

Employment Outlook

The National Bureau for Labor Statistics reports that, "job opportunities are expected to remain good. Employment of respiratory therapists is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2010, because of substantial growth of the middle-aged and elderly population—a development that will heighten the incidence of cardiopulmonary disease.

Older Americans suffer most from respiratory ailments and cardiopulmonary diseases such as pneumonia, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and heart disease. As their numbers increase, the need for respiratory therapists will increase, as well. In addition, advances in treating victims of heart attacks, accident victims, and premature infants (many of whom are dependent on a ventilator during part of their treatment) will increase the demand for the services of respiratory care practitioners."



Salaries and Benefits

Salaries differ throughout California, though all regions consider entry or advanced level education and experience in setting salaries. In January 2006, the Board polled approximately 30 hospitals throughout the State, and found these salary ranges:

RCP-Entry Level

\$20 - \$37/hour or up to \$6,364/mo. & \$76,368/year

RCP-Level II

\$20 - \$41/hour or up to \$7,052/mo. & \$84,624/year

RCP-Supervisor/Coordinator

\$25 - \$45/hour or up to \$7,740/mo. & \$92,880/year

RCP-Manager/Director

\$40 - \$58/hour or up to \$9,976/mo. & \$119,712/year

Many employers also offer medical, dental, vision, and/or life insurances, paid vacation, sick leave, and/or retirement plans.



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For more information and a full brochure on this exciting career, please contact the Respiratory Care Board of California.

A list of respiratory care education programs, as well as links to other valuable resources are available at the Respiratory Care Board's Website: www.rcb.ca.gov



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Career Information

Respiratory Care

A Medical Career
Giving A Breath of Life



Unlimited opportunities await you in this exciting medical profession



Respiratory Care Board
Department of Consumer Affairs
State of California

Respiratory Care



What is Respiratory Care?

Respiratory care provides relief to millions of Americans who have difficulty breathing or cannot sustain the act of breathing on their own.

Many people, from newborns to the elderly, have trouble breathing due to impaired or nonfunctioning lungs. Typical patients of respiratory care suffer from asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchitis, lung cancer, stroke, drowning accidents, heart attacks, birth defects, emphysema, cystic fibrosis, and sleep apnea.

Respiratory care includes, but is not limited to:

Employing life support mechanical ventilation for patients who can't breathe adequately on their own;

Administering medications in aerosol form;

Monitoring equipment and patients' responses to therapy;

Operating various types of highly sophisticated equipment;

Obtaining blood specimens and analyzing them to determine levels of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases;

Maintaining artificial airways (i.e., tracheostomy or intubation);

Measuring the capacity of patients' lungs to determine if there is impairment;

Obtaining and analyzing sputum specimens and chest x-rays;

Interpreting data obtained from tests;

Assessing vital signs and other indicators of respiratory dysfunction;

Performing stress tests and other studies of the cardiopulmonary system;

Studying disorders of people with disruptive sleep patterns; Conducting rehabilitation activities; and

Conducting asthma education and smoking cessation programs.

In California, respiratory care may only be provided by licensed respiratory care practitioners.

Respiratory Care Practitioners

Respiratory Care Practitioners (RCPs) are one of three licensed health care professionals who work at patients' bedsides most often. The other two are physicians and registered nurses.

RCPs work under a medical director and specialize in providing evaluation of and treatment to patients with breathing difficulties as a result of heart, lung, and other disorders. They also provide diagnostic, educational, and rehabilitative services.

Work Settings

Hospitals employ the majority of RCPs, however, there is a growing number being employed at alternative sites. RCPs may be employed in any of the following settings:

Hospitals

Emergency rooms

Intensive care units

Flight transports

Critical care units

Hyperbaric oxygen units

Neonatal/Pediatric units

Homes

Skilled nursing facilities, and

Various laboratories:

Pulmonary function

Rehabilitation

Cardiopulmonary lab

Blood gas lab, and

Sleep testing

Work Shifts

RCPs generally work between 35 and 40 hours a week. Because

care is generally given around the clock in most settings, therapists may work evenings, nights, or weekends. The most common shifts are three 12-hour shifts, four 9-hour shifts, and five 8-hour shifts per week.

Education

The minimum educational requirements for licensure as an RCP include an Associate Degree with completion of an approved respiratory care program.

There are approximately 27 schools throughout California that offer respiratory care programs. Areas of study include courses in human anatomy and physiology, chemistry, physics, microbiology, and mathematics. Programs also include clinical practice at area or local hospitals. Programs take 2 years of full-time dedication to complete.



Newly licensed RCPs were asked what they like about their career and what drew them to the respiratory care field. This is what they had to say:

"I enjoy respiratory therapy, because it makes my life meaningful knowing that I am helping and in some cases saving lives."

"I really like working with the doctors; they rely on our expertise and assessment skills."

"I particularly enjoy the one-on-one contact with patients. I spend time explaining treatments and monitoring their responses to therapy."

"I was excited about becoming a respiratory care practitioner because I wanted to help people."

"I entered my respiratory care program because I wanted to specialize in an area of health care."

"A busy day may include assembling, operating and monitoring various medical devices which allows me to administer oxygen, or medications to assist with breathing—I also love the flexible hours."